



Powerful Presentations in the Global Classroom

by [Raúl Sánchez](#) and [Dan Bullock](#)

Every speaking situation is an opportunity for change; when we remind students that they are a catalyst when presenting, we encourage them to activate their hidden potential. Whether presenting to a small group or a larger audience, students must be taught to recognize that a universal goal of any presentation is to create a connection between presenter and audience that ignites some kind of lasting change.

How to Supercharge Students' Presentation Skills

As teachers and trainers, how do we teach multilingual learners of English to make this connection when delivering a presentation to an international audience? How do we ensure that the presentation message will resonate with a mixed audience, especially when the audience is from different parts of the world with different languages and different communication styles—all in the same room?

Presenting effectively to a global audience requires more than just a strong message. A number of strategies help us drive our message home and yield the results we want, including the following:

- using visual aids to activate the senses
- appealing to multiple communication styles to connect with global audiences
- employing linguistic patterns for impact
- using purposeful body language to highlight key points
- achieving clarity with the use of Global English

With key techniques, English language students can successfully hone public speaking fluency, scaffold presentations using nonlinguistic strategies, and combine expressive sequences for cognitive impact.

5 Tips to Sharpen Presentation Skills

Use the following five tips to help students across [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#) (CEFR) Levels A1–C2 hone presentation skills that build confidence, enhance fluency, and connect with mixed audiences from all over the world.

1. Encourage Students to Enliven Presentations Using Schemata

In the attention economy of today, our brains have grown even more intrinsically hardwired for stories. We often need to remind students that this principle still applies in presentations. As a presenter, our overarching goal is to “light up” the cognitive centers in our listeners’ minds using what we know in our field as *schemata*.

In its plural form, *schema* is the cognitive framework in our minds that helps us understand and interpret information more clearly. Suppose a student is delivering a presentation: You as the teacher hear the presenter tell the audience that they bought a chair without providing any additional details about that chair (e.g., the color, the size, the material, etc.). The provided information only tells the audience that a chair was purchased. However, if the student polled the audience about the type of chair they imagined in their minds, some listeners may have pictured a wooden chair, others might have pictured a metal chair, and others, perhaps even a black leather armchair! What is important to convey to the student is that the particular image that comes to mind for different audience members depends on the cultural and personal experiences of each listener in the space. Therefore, we must *present information through two or more of the five senses* to further convey information interculturally and activate schema for our audiences.

The most successful presenters use schemata to achieve a higher focus from listeners and activate learning centers in the brain, even if the presentation is technical. Having students practice using vivid and sensory language to convey topics, contexts, and scenarios is a productive technique for enhancing ways of presenting with the five senses and activating schema.

Consider a presentation titled “Entrepreneurship in the Age of Globalization,” which is riddled with jargon-specific terms not easily translatable across cultures. In this case, you could instruct the student to include an image or video clip of Steve Jobs of Apple or Jack Ma of Alibaba on the initial slides to heighten the impact of their message. Visual aids have the power to focus attention and are a prime place to start for tapping into schema. As Hurst (1996) writes in [The Handbook of Communication Skills](#), visual aids “show information which is not easily expressed in words,” and they “cause the audience to employ another sense to receive information” (p. 69). Ultimately, we must encourage students to present information through more than one sense to create a deeper appeal and impact among the audience.

Other useful ways for students to activate the schemata of listeners and further immerse the audience in the sensory world of the topic are to introduce topics by

- playing evocative audio clips,
- relaying dynamic anecdotes,

- using compelling video/images,
- or using relevant props (including hands-on activities or a 3D model).

2. Help Students Navigate Between Implicit and Explicit Messaging in a Presentation

The field of intercultural communication has grown since Hall wrote [*The Silent Language*](#) (Hall, 1973) and outlined two frameworks still in contemporary use for approaching intercultural communication: high- and low-context communication styles. Helping students be versatile in these two communication styles enhances presentation delivery for diverse audiences.

According to Hall, Eastern cultures utilize implicit communication styles, which tend to present information in an indirect way and gradually “roll out” information with extensive details that build toward the main message at the conclusion of the presentation. Western audiences, on the other hand, expect more explicit or clearly defined chunks of content, with the main message introduced in the beginning of the presentation and then repeated throughout.

When presenting to culturally diverse audiences, students need to adjust their message accordingly. If they’re unsure which style they should use in a mixed audience, we commonly recommend that students be as explicit as possible about their call to action while continually rephrasing the takeaway messages. Generally, demonstrating for students how to revisit shifts in topic from explicit wording to implicit wording and back to the main message throughout the presentation will provide the necessary aid for diverse audiences to uptake the information in a clear fashion and retain key information.

3. Guide Students to Group Information Into Patterns

Patterns are all around us and even more so with the prompt patterns of ChatGPT and applied linguistics of other [large language models](#) (Gordon, 2023). In a world made up of patterns, we as humans try to search for patterns in everything we do, especially when receiving new information. In fact, “research shows that people retain structured information up to 40% more reliably and accurately than information presented in a more freeform manner” (Abrahams, 2014). Teaching students to use linguistic patterns in messaging remains a key structural element of intercultural presentations.

When hearing presentations, people tend to group information into patterns. Therefore, guide students to reinforce their message by utilizing patterns at the sentence level in their next presentation. Consider having students group linguistic content, such as their main concepts, into triads. For example, think of Julius Caesar’s famous phrase: “I came, I saw, I conquered.” This will not only help students reach their audience better but also help their audience retain the information.

This same method of speaking in threes (or triads) has been effective in many notable historical presentations as well. The technique was used by Abraham Lincoln to advocate for the Emancipation Proclamation ending slavery in the United States. He utilized a well-known statement, comprising three elements found in the U.S. Declaration of Independence: “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (1776, para. 3).

Why is the number three so powerful in linguistic phrasing, and thus presentations? The answer resides in how our brains are wired and in our human ability to recognize patterns. Three is the smallest number needed to create a pattern, making triads very effective in the capacity for others to retain information. Having students condense and organize their main points in a presentation into triads allows the audience to process the information more readily, making it easier for them to remember key points.

Compounding this concept with other parallel structures (e.g., “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” from *A Tale of Two Cities*; Dickens, 1921) allows the audience to mentally engage and group information more effectively while at the same time heightening anticipation for the next point. This cognitive technique has the audience naturally trying to anticipate your next statement.

4. Help Students Use Purposeful Body Language and Vocalics to Emphasize Key Points

People are drawn to movement, and this is pivotal in effective presentations. Teaching students to move as they speak will not only capture the audience’s attention but, more important, will also guide their listeners’ attention toward key messaging. As Kinsey Goman (2014) writes, “It can be especially effective to move toward the audience before making a key point and away when you want to signal a break or a change of subject.” This practical technique can turn any presentation into an impactful force.

Goman also elaborates on the importance of using the presentation space to reinforce ideas. For example, if a student is presenting two issues, instruct the student to talk about each issue from a different physical position, perhaps from different sides of the stage. This use of body language to mark sections in a presentation can guide a global audience to key contrasting points and enhance the clear communication of ideas in the delivery of the presentation.

However, we must caution students to avoid moving around the stage when they’re making a crucial point because doing so will diffuse the impact of their message delivery and overall presentation. You have the most impact when you combine purposeful movement with deliberate physical pauses—using body language to mark sections in a presentation and then standing absolutely still when highlighting your presentation’s most important points.

Furthermore, in addition to body language, we can instruct students to focus on *vocalics* by exploring ways to alter the pitch, rhythm, and volume of their voice throughout a speech. When making a definitive statement to the audience, instruct students to lower the pitch of their voice and increase the volume without shouting. Alternatively, students can increase their pace of speaking to heighten audience interest in certain presentation sections. In general, when employing intentional voice patterns throughout a presentation or speech, audiences use speaker cues to note what content is being emphasized for key takeaways.

5. Help Students Communicate With International Audiences Using Global English

Much of the world has shifted to using Global English—which refers to English that has been optimized for a global audience. Essentially, [Global English](#) (Bullock & Sánchez, 2021) is a purposeful type of English usage adopted by the global business world that is focused on clear and plain language (with a limited number of idioms and cultural references). Students will enhance their public speaking skills in the globalized era when they become acclimated to using clear diction that is readily understood in a Global English capacity.

As English has become the primary means of communication between businesses in diverse countries, the world is moving toward a new international business English that is practical and useful to corporations globally. The same remains true for international presentations. We can help students adjust to this shift by reminding them that nonglobal English includes idioms, cultural references, acronyms, business-isms, phrasal verbs, and sarcasm. For example, you can give students phrasing samples in nonglobal English and then ask them to practice rephrasing the content into Global English.

Try having students replace the nonglobal English terms/phrases used in their presentations with more specific/concrete and clear Global English terms/phrases. Here are some examples:

- **Phrasal Verbs:** Rephrase the phrasal verb in “*draw up* the contract” to a single word verb (e.g., “*draft* the contract”).
- **Business-isms:** Rephrase the business-ism “pain points” with a clear noun (e.g., “challenges”).
- **Idioms:** Rephrase the idiomatic phrase “we need their *buy in*” with a concrete phrase (e.g., “we need their *support*”).

Instilling in students an awareness of Global English during the delivery of their presentations will help them deliver clearer messages when communicating with an international audience.

Conclusion: Igniting Global Sparklines

Overall, when delivering a business presentation, whether that is online or in person, we must encourage students to reflect on how someone from another culture might interpret it. Being mindful of cultural considerations and implementing these five tips can lead multilingual learners of English to deliver successful presentations that ignite lasting change.

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